

# LYRA BELGICA

I

TWO FLEMISH POETS



BELGIAN GOVERNMENT INFORMATION CENTER  
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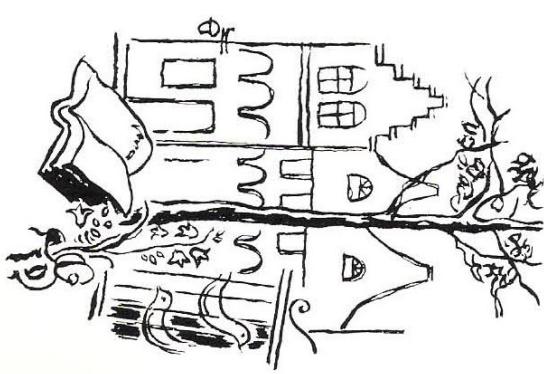
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NOTE: A second booklet, TYRA BELGICA II, will be devoted to translations of  
*French-Belgian poets* by Clark and Frances Stillman.



TYRA BELGICA

I

GUIDO GEZELLE

KAREL VAN DE WOESTIJNE

IN ENGLISH TRANSLATION

BY

CLARK AND FRANCES STILLMAN

BELGIAN GOVERNMENT INFORMATION CENTER

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1950

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This booklet contains a selection from the work of the two greatest Flemish poets of Belgium, Guido Gezelle (1830-1899) and Karel van de Woestijne (1878-1929).

Belgium is a bi-lingual country, French and Flemish being the two official languages. Therefore there exist, side by side in Belgium, two literatures, sharing much in common cultural heritage, but written in completely different languages. French is of course French. Flemish is the same language as Dutch, varying from it about as much as American English varies from British English.

Flemish poetry depends for its magic on the same kind of accent pattern as that of English, a very important consideration in the rendering of poetry between two languages. It is the opinion of the present translators that as close a correspondence with the original poem as is possible between two languages can be achieved between Flemish and English. That is, of course, not to say that the poem can be quite the same when rendered or recreated in another language and by another mind. The very best poems will practically always lose something in the process. When occasionally there is a triumph, and the translated version is as good as the original, or sometimes even a bit better, the translator should be chastened by the knowledge that the poem was no doubt among the second-best in the original language.

Guido Gezelle was born in the same year in which Belgium became a nation in the modern sense. Before 1830, the provinces of the low countries which compose modern Belgium had undergone many metamorphoses. However, Caesar himself referred to the *Belgae*, so we may assume that even at that early date there was a Belgian idea, if not a Belgian state. Everyone knows how Belgium has been a battleground of Europe; Span-

INTRODUCTION

iards. Austrians, French, succeeded each other as bosses on Belgian soil. The battle of Waterloo was fought a few miles from Brussels, in the middle of Belgium. The union of the Belgian provinces with Holland after Napoleon's defeat did not work out happily, and in 1830, with the help and support of England, Belgium was established as an independent state.

It was in Bruges (Flemish *Brugge*) that Guido Gezelle, the son of a gardener, was born. The boy showed evidence of ability and was trained for the priesthood. After his ordination, he taught at Roeselare (French *Roulers*) and then at Bruges. In 1873, he was sent to a curacy at Kortrijk (French *Courtrai*), and there spent twenty-five years, not returning to Bruges until the last year of his life. He died in 1899.

Gezelle's life was one of busy service as teacher and parish priest. He was also very active in working for the revival and rehabilitation of Flemish as a literary language, particularly the past and present speech of his people of West Flanders.

His work is marked by a deep love of nature, of God and of his Flemish land and people. He delighted in the play of sounds, and used intricate patterns of rhyme and meter, assonance and alliteration, with all the ease of a virtuoso. Some of these pieces, as charming as bright bubbles in the original, are completely impossible of translation; made up almost entirely of surface effects, they collapse if the bright surface cannot be retained. However, much of his work is packed with meaning of a religious mystic import, which raises it to a very high level of thought and feeling.

the legend of D. H. Lawrence.

Gezelle is certainly the best known and best loved poet of Flanders. In his intimate, deceptively simple appearing verses, he touched a chord that is still vibrating in his people. Deeply Flemish as he is, he was not narrow. To his native inheritance, he added outside influences of the world and the century. However, he is one of the most individual figures of that century, apart from any literary school or group, working out his poetic message close to his people.

*Karel van de Woestijne* was born in Ghent on March 10, 1878. The outer facts of his life are few and simple. To his family's business of dealing in copper articles he felt no attraction and preferred to devote himself to study and writing. He practiced the profession of journalism during almost his entire career, serving as Belgian correspondent and literary critic for one of the large Dutch newspapers. In his later years he was Professor of Literature at the University of Ghent. After a long struggle with tuberculosis he died at his home near Ghent, in 1929, at the age of fifty-one.

It is too early for the full story of his life to have appeared in print. However, it seems that in the intensity and tragedy of his human relationships and emotional life, and in his ill health, may be found the key to the strange power and substance of his work. For if the facts of his known biography seem simple, his poetry reveals his inner life as complex, intense and tragic. No poet was more deeply personal, more intense in the reflection of his inner life, not Baudelaire, nor van de Woestijne's ultra-refined and sensitive contemporary, Rilke. His work is recognizably of the same world as the tormented masterpiece of Proust and the work and the legend of D. H. Lawrence.

The well and the sick—that is the first impression one has as he reads Gezelle and van de Woestijne. The earlier writer seems wholesome and uncomplicated, even in his profoundities. The latter displays a heightened sensibility, a sort of heavy feverishness, an exploring of his own personality almost beyond the limits of the bearable. Self-tortured and suffering, from whatever cause, van de Woestijne wrote poems that strike the reader like a body blow. Yet the extreme beauty of his expression, the strange, heavy magic of his music, enchant even while they pain. He brought a richness of tone and mood that was new in Flemish literature.

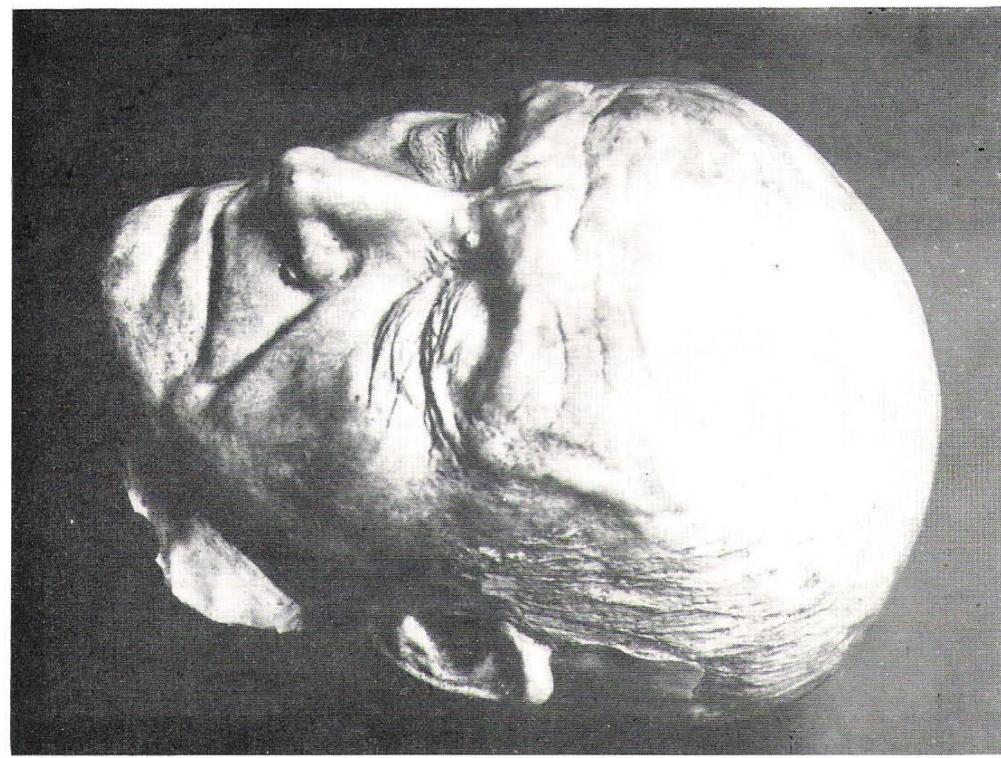
A final word on the form of these translations may be of interest. In the case of the Gezelle poems, the form of the original has been meticulously observed; his intricate stanzas and lines of varying length have

all been respected. It has not always been possible to retain as many rhymes as the original, but except for that, the rhyme schemes are the same. The translation of van de Woestijne's poems involves a problem in the rendering of his frequent and continued use of the Alex- andrine or six-foot iambic line. The sonnet FLANDERS OR HOUSE OF PLENTY, for example, is written entirely in Alexandrines. The natural, flowing line in English is the shorter iambic pentameter. To render some of van de Woestijne's poems entirely in Alexandrines would not give the same effect in English as in Flemish, largely because Flemish has many more weak or unaccented syllables than English. We have resolved this problem by employing some Alexandrines interspersed with more natural English iambic pentameter. This serves to give the impression of length and a certain heaviness present in the original, while not sacrificing the easy flow of the Flemish poem.

It is the hope of the translators that these poems can be read with enjoyment simply as English poems. Our first aim in choosing these particular translations among those we have made from Gezelle and van de Woestijne over a number of years was to present those which seemed most successful as English lyrics, rather than those which were the most important works of the author. However, many of the latter are included.

#### TRANSLATIONS FROM GEZELLE

F. S.  
C. S.



*Death Mask of Guido Gezelle*

## THAT EVENING AND THAT ROSE

Oh, many and many an hour with you  
I've passed the time with pleasure,  
and never has one hour with you  
been less to me than treasure.

Oh, many and many a flower for you  
to offer you I've plucked,  
and like a bee, with you, with you,  
its honey have I sucked.

But never an hour so dear with you  
as long as it could stay,  
and never an hour so sad for you  
when I must go away,

as the hour when I came close to you  
that evening, and sat down,

and heard you speak and spoke to you  
of all our souls had known.

And never a flower was plucked by you  
so beautiful to see

as the one that shone that night on you  
and soon might come to me.

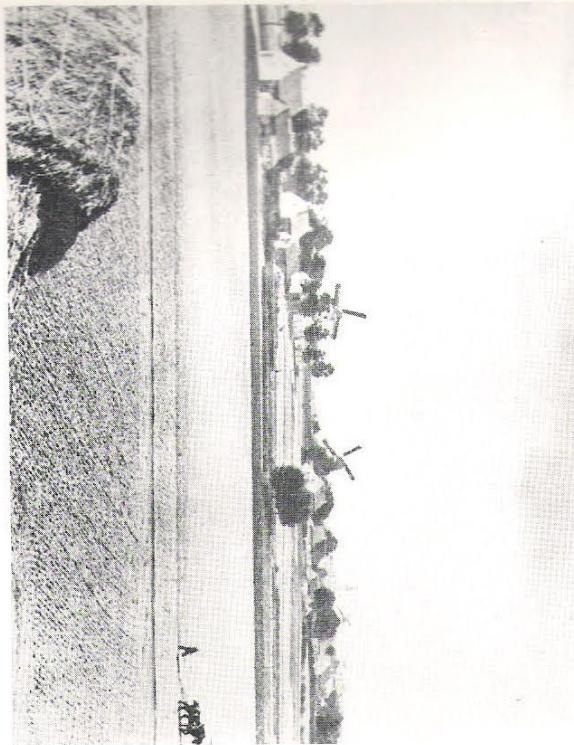
Although for me as well as you—  
oh who can cure this wrong?—

an hour with me, an hour with you,  
is not an hour for long,  
and though for me and though for you

so dear a flower we chose.

a rose, be it even a rose from you,  
remains not long a rose.

But in my heart I say to you—  
though how long no man knows—  
I keep three well loved pictures: you,  
that evening, and that rose.



FLEMISH LANDSCAPE. *The peaceful, flat countryside of Flanders, with its fertile fields, its modest houses, its windmills, often inspired Guido Gezelie.*

## SONG

O Song, O Song,  
you help the pain  
when grief strikes, and disaster—  
O Song, the wounded heart again  
grows whole when you are master;  
O Song, O Song,  
my thirst's relief,  
you quench when fires are breaking—  
O Song, you can assuage all grief  
and the arid breast stop aching;  
O Song, O Song,  
the silent tears  
that on my cheek run warm,  
you can, with art that's only yours,  
to honey them transform,  
O Song, O Song!

O rustling of the river reed,  
could I but know the song you plead!  
Whenever breezes pass along  
and move your bending stem in song,  
you bend and, bowing to the shore,  
stand up and meekly bend once more,  
and sing the song so sadly keyed,  
the song I love, O slender reed!

O rustling of the reedy sedge,  
beside the quiet water's edge  
how often, often sat I not  
in that all solitary spot,  
and saw the water's rippling trail,  
and watched your stalks so weak and frail,  
and heard the song so sweetly keyed  
you sang for me, O rustling reed!

O rustling of the river reed,  
how many people do not heed  
the singing voice you lift in song,  
but listen not, and pass along,  
along to where the heart grows cold,  
forever plagued by clinking gold,  
not understanding all you plead,  
O my beloved, rustling reed!

And still, O rustling, slender reed,  
your singing's not so slight a deed.  
God made the stream, God made your stem,  
Io, God said: "Blow," and breezes came,  
and breezes blew your green and brown  
thin stem that rises up and down.  
God listened, and your song sad-keyed  
pleased God Himself, O rustling reed!

## O RUSTLING OF THE RIVER REED

## MOTHER

Oh no, my slender, rustling reed,  
my soul disdains not what you plead,  
my soul that from the same God came  
Who gave me feeling in His name,  
that understands your plaintive cries  
when up and down you bend and rise.  
Oh no, oh no, my rustling reed,  
my soul disdains not what you plead!

O rustling of the river reed,  
like yours may my sad song be keyed,  
complaining come before His feet  
Who gave us both our life to keep.  
O You Whose love does not forsake  
the sick speech of a reedy brake,  
scorn not my sad complaint in need,  
I, but a sick, complaining reed!

No drawing and  
no photograph,  
no chiseled thing  
of stone,  
unless it be  
that memory  
you left in me  
alone.

Oh may I, all  
unworthy, dear,  
that picture ever  
cherish,  
and honored let  
it live in me,  
and honored with me  
perish.

## WHY SO SLOW

Why so slow? The clouds go rushing  
by so light,  
the wind is up, the waters blue  
bewitch me quite.  
They say, "Come out, come out to sea  
and dare with me!"  
I do not hear the wind say no.  
Why so slow?

## THE LITTLE WRITER

O crinkling, twinkling, watery thing,  
you with your little black cap,  
I love to see your alert little head  
as you write in the water's lap.

You live and you move and so fast you spell,  
though no arm or leg I spy,  
you turn and you know your way so well,  
though I can't see any eye—

What were you, what are you, when all is said?  
Won't you please stand still and explain?  
What are you really, fine little head,  
who never tire of the game?

Over the mirroring water you run,  
yet you do not disturb it more  
than a smooth and soft little breeze had done  
that blew there a moment before.

O little writers on water, tell me—  
you are certainly twenty strong,  
and is there not one who can tell it to me?—  
what are you writing so long?

You write and it does not stay on the water,  
you write and it's gone anew,  
no Christian knows what the meaning is—  
oh tell me, writer, do!

Is it little fishes that you must spell out?  
Is it little plants that you hymn?  
Is it leaves and flowerlets you're writing about?  
Or the water where you skim?

## HOSANNAH

Is it little birds that twitter and twit?  
Or the great, blue, curving shelf  
that shines above like a heavenly arch?  
Or you, little writer, yourself?

And the crinkling, twinkling, watery thing, alert with its little black hood, it paused, and it raised its little, quick ears, and there for a moment it stood.

We write, so it said, all the crinkling down  
that our Master, our very own,  
in making us, taught us and gave us to write,  
one lesson, and one alone.

We write, and isn't it really plain,  
that lesson?—Are you such a clod?  
We write, and we write, and we write again,  
the Holy Name of God!

Hosannah sing!  
Palm Sunday's here.  
Jerusalem,  
    fling wide,  
fling wide your doors;  
come kneel along  
the dusty road  
    outside,  
and kiss the steps,  
the footprints of  
the little beast  
    so proud  
that bears into  
Jerusalem—  
Hosannah sing!—  
the Lord.

## EVENING

The evening evenings; slowly, sadly,  
down the sun a-sinking goes,  
daylight fades, and then comes sweetly  
perfume from the evening rose.  
Quietly, no stir nor shout,  
night pinches daytime's candle out.

## YOU PRAYED UPON THE MOUNT

You prayed upon the mount alone,  
but. . . Jesus, mountains find I none  
that I can climb to reach as high  
as You, alone beneath the sky.  
The world will follow, that I know,  
where'er I go  
or pause  
or even turn my gaze.  
And poor as I am is there none,  
not one,  
who suffers, nor can cry to God,  
who hungers, nor can ask for food,  
who hurts, and yet who cannot say  
    how hard his way—  
Fool that I am, oh teach me how a man should pray!

## IN THE EVENING

Of stars alone is one aware  
in that blue and lofty air there,  
nothing else but stars so fair  
in that blue and lofty air.

Here there's never aught but care,  
naught but black and ancient care here!  
Here there happens nothing fair,  
only black and ancient care.

Let me, let me from this care  
fly into that lofty air there,  
where one sees those stars up there,  
nothing but those stars so fair.

## THE ROOT AND THE FLOWER

O splendor wild and true and rich  
Of flowers along the water-ditch,  
I like you, dressed as God found fair,  
Standing in the water there,

Born uncontentious, innocent,  
And put just where your Maker meant.  
There you stand, in sun and shower,  
And all you do is be a flower!

It's Being that I see displayed,  
It's Truth, upright and unafraid.

And He Who joys my heart through you  
Is simple, you are simple too.

How still it is! No leaflet blows  
That might disturb the sweet repose,

No ripple in these darling bowers  
Of water standing full of flowers,

No wind, no word; spread all around  
Are shade and quietude profound.

Then deep within the water lies,  
Pale-green, the blue vault of the skies.

And piercing here and there, unspun,  
A long, unravelled thread of sun!

How noble, beautiful and good  
Can be a single flower bud.

ICHTHUS EIS AIEI

That suddenly, as if unplanned.  
Springs from its Creator's hand!

Through Him, and through no human sowing,  
Came this humble seed to growing,

Through Him, this moment of this day,  
It bloomed, and comfort came my way;

For flower, you make me pray, and see  
That I must be as I must be,

Looking deep, and seeing in  
Each farthest end how things begin:

The root of all—there comes to me  
A better word, God's primacy.

It is Mayday weather, shining  
everywhere, and no leaf blows.  
On the crystal fish-pond water  
stirs no ripple, rush nor splatter;  
time grows later  
and the sun, still mirrored, glows.

Down there in his sunken pathways  
lies the fish. No foot nor hand,  
skin nor hair nor feathers has he,  
but all patient-waiting is he;  
back and forward,  
to and fro, his fins are fanned.

Shining eyes he has that strike as  
queer, just how I can't surmise.  
When he's sleeping, eating, drinking,  
coming up or downward sinking,  
never blinking,  
never does he shut his eyes.

With his mouth he's always munching,  
no one sees the start or close,  
always pumping, without pausing,  
with his munching mouth, and working  
with his jaws,  
in and out the water goes.

Wondrous creature, lost to language,  
reft of word and tongue and sense,  
you're the image of unfurried,  
never slandered, never hurried,  
mother-naked,  
shameless, primal innocence.

## I HEAR THE SOUND OF TRUMPETS

Once the water was employed to  
sweep away all beasts and men,

all save those who, in the ark  
made to save them, did embark,

    who came back

safe from wreck and danger dark.

Fish it was who swam the crisis  
out, untouched by God's wroth hand.

Oh, if we might have our wishes,  
    might hereafter, safe and cherished,

    be as fishes

    where Your nets strong-woven stand,

God, of whom in olden times,  
    keeping hid Your how and why,  
it was said, in word or symbol,  
    "Take the Fish, and He will give you  
    life eternal."  
Help us, *Ichthus Eis Aiei!*

I hear the sound of trumpets and  
    the evening is at hand  
    for me.

Children blithe and blonde, come here,  
    the evening is at hand,  
    come near.

God bless you, children, for it's clear  
    the evening is at hand,  
    come near.

I hear the sound of trumpets and  
    the evening is at hand  
    for me.

PRAYER

Have compassion!  
Much I sang now am still,  
(Have compassion)  
Now no longer can or will  
(Have compassion)  
Sing again: I am resigned,  
(Have compassion)  
Old and poor and almost blind.  
Have compassion!

TRANSLATIONS FROM VAN DE WOESTIJNE



KAREL VAN DE WOESTIJNE, *by Gustave van de Woestijne*  
—Photo A C L

## AGAIN THE LATE LAST LIGHT

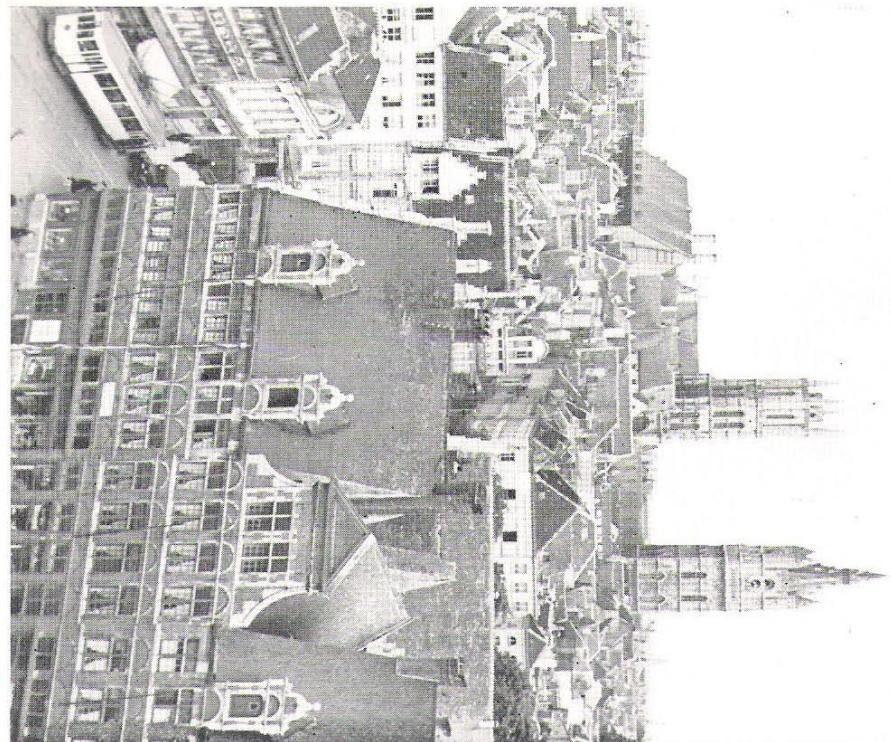
Again the late last light of asters blooms,  
again a fall draws near. And this sore heart  
when summer's smoking torch sinks into gloom  
once more is torn apart.

I in whose hand the ripe fruit seemed to be  
a bliss denied, no taste of it my own,  
who, knowing you, O autumn sympathy,  
feel all the more alone—

Eternal mower, I, who cut the grain  
but never bound the sheaves nor owned a part,  
unending sailor on this furrowed main  
who never came to port—

Again a fall draws near, again denying  
this heart that, hopeless, still feels longing's sting,  
that, always hankering for this autumn dying,  
past winter knows a spring—

Again my blood burns in its autumn mood,  
again my heart grieves in its battered rooms—  
how bronze the gold grows in the chestnut wood!  
The silver aster blooms . . .



GHENT. *The city where Karel van de Woestijne was born.*  
—Photo Charles Leirens.

## I'M LONELY-SAD

## YOUR FACE CHANTS MEMORIES

I'm lonely-sad in sallow evening light . . .

The window's open, and I hear the fall  
of clammy petals by the garden wall . . .

—and cannot tell yet whether I shall love  
her in the graceful movement of her limbs  
and in her goodness in my strangest self . . .

I feel so sad, and hear her footsteps, slow,  
and her soft humming, in the yard below.

Your face chants memories, child, your face so white,  
and sweet the story of our days together  
that like green gardens lay in quiet weather  
all bathed in tenderness of evening light,  
while round the garden garment-like, the sky  
wraps tranquil shade, and trees still hold the faint  
last bird-voice raised in glimmering complaint  
that sinks, then swells, and then begins to die . . .

Now, child, no song lives round us, and there seem  
like quiet gardens no peace-days at all;  
no twilight weaves about our mingling dream,  
and round our parted limbs sad shadows fall . . .

And nights I see, last comfort before sleeping,  
the silence of your sad white face in weary weeping.

## HOW SAD THE RAIN

## NOW COME TO YOUR SHORE

How sad the rain is in the weary fall,  
so sadly raining in the autumn lane.

—And oh how heavy hang the flowers in fall;  
—and steady rain still streaming down the pane . . .

Sway-still stand gray trees in the gray out there,  
the good, soft-sighing trees that weep alone;  
—and 'tis the wind, and 'tis a helpless air  
of moan-song moaning in a dying tone . . .

—Now I should hear the good old shuffling tread;  
now I should see the old peace-picture bright,  
my good, gray comfort-mother round the bed  
where fever dreams itself a flaming light,  
and grief bursts out in tears that burn like gall . . .

—How sad my sadness should dispel all ease  
and languish in the drabness of the trees;  
—how sad the rain is in the weary fall.

Now come to your shore's endless gleaming;  
disposed to your passion's wild sway;  
with the fondest hopes of our dreaming  
and the pride of our deep dismay;

and eager for comforts that ease,  
and thankful for troubles that test:  
we look to the gold of your east,  
we look to the black of your west.

And under our dress of illusion  
life tearing our breast apart,  
on our lips the salt tears of confusion,  
but your salt like a food in the heart;

Sea, holder of fragile wave-patterns  
and mighty with winds that are wild,  
stretched out the most shameless of slatterns  
and bare like an innocent child.

Oh Sea, that on slow-dawning morns  
lies waiting the day from the night,  
in your lap the oncoming storms  
and your face cold-pale in the light;

behold, we are come to your gleaming,  
afraid of eternity's sway,  
with the fondest hopes of our dreaming  
and the pride of our deep dismay . . .

## OH SICK, UNCERTAIN

Oh sick, uncertain and defiled,  
our only care for our own life,  
we've no quick shudder, no taut smile,  
but for the fore-doomed strife.

Ever on the sullen sea, the silent  
sunken sails, the sun's dull shine —  
ever the same unchanging island  
on every new horizon line.

Oh the girls from out the taverns,  
their lap is a luscious bed,  
they see the lads there gladly,  
they bear their children dead.

The silk that they wear is fiery,  
the bodice is strained and wet.  
At their side we stir and awaken  
with the wooden mouth of regret.

The round, round sea where we wander,  
that beckons and lures all our life,  
it makes us bowl with our longing,  
and widows our distant wife.

We anchor then in the taverns,  
where rest is a sort of strife.  
There scarlet wait the wenches.  
It is there that we shake off life.

## OH THE GIRLS FROM OUT THE TAVERNS

## THE ANCIENT LOOMS

The ancient looms and smithies buzzing here like bees,  
and lilting fisher songs along these river quays . . .  
— O Lord, am I cast out beyond your realm of grace,  
that I should be so lonely in this busy place?

The evening, face of rest resigned unto my kiss,  
is weary from the sadness of my beastliness;  
and that poor bread, O Lord, that fed my sorry days,  
was bread prepared outside the circle of Your praise.

And heavier You weigh on me, and dull I bend  
before the sight of those who humbly bear their load . . .  
The work-scarred people walk the road to summer's end;  
a lonely stranger, I, who walk the autumn road.

O father, you who died in pain as evening neared,  
who gave me life and taught me tenderly to live  
with your soft voice and trembling hands so glad to  
give,  
and when you died the late sun glinting on your beard;  
I who am now as one who drifts in eventide,  
and laxly leaves the oars at rest there, driven only  
by summer breezes in the low reefs wandering lonely,  
who sometimes plucks the water-lilies at his side,

and sings sometimes, indifferent; and his singing billows  
wide-sighing o'er the languid water, and the willows  
as if to their own sighing listen to his song . . .

So drifts, in peace and dream, my life death longs to  
take,  
till lingering in the mirror of a deeper lake  
my face beholds your face, and bends there looking long.

## O FATHER, YOU WHO DIED

## WHO KNOWS BUT WHAT MY LOVE

Who knows but what my love for you will falter, child,  
strange, calm and tender-soft like evening round a tomb . . .  
For he who reconciled sets out to meet his doom,  
who knows what woman will refresh his parching lips  
with luscious fruit along the way, and love's sweet gifts?

For see, I think of you, though you are strange to me,  
though, tender-soft and calm and in my mind a wife,  
you draw your quiet breath that no love-fright makes race  
and make no single movement gestured toward my life:  
I think of your gray eyes so soft in your white face.

## YOU SAID THEN MASTER

You said then: "Master", slipped away . . .  
And shuddering, awaking  
from the old pain in the old way  
I felt new sighs were breaking.

And creeping rain was like a song  
of endless slow dejection  
that wrapped in distance thick and long  
the dawnless east's direction.

And in the house where, tired and flat,  
all life with tears was welling,  
it seemed to me who loitered that  
the fruit was riper smelling . . .

— Who are you who, in bitter play  
that killed my dream the faster,  
on such a day have gone away,  
O you who called me "Master"?

## NOW YOU ARE BETTER

## FLANDERS, O HOUSE OF PLENTY

Now you are better, peaceful and inviolate,  
and like a threshold freshly painted somber gray.  
And though your eyes are sad, they had their words to say:  
from your love tree I broke the thorns away . . .

—Now this is best, to rest in my calm arms.  
Now can a new spring bloom upon your grace . . .  
And should you still, recalling kiss my face,  
you kiss a lovely corpse, the son of our embrace.

O Flanders, O house of plenty, where we sit as friends  
at tables heaped with food! — now waving fields  
of summer grain stretch out their breathing yields  
far towards the crimson east where dawn ascends  
while morning wakes in Flanders and the sky:—

Oh, who can know you and not feel his heart leap  
high? —  
not speak his thanks for days so gloriously spread,  
the thanks a beggar gives for warm wheat bread? . . .

O Flanders, gay with present-bearing hands,  
and, as you go, in gold and purple dress,

bestowing fruit, all heavy with your fruitfulness;  
— Flanders, who knows you and the dawn's caress  
and feels no love flare through him where he stands,  
like this warm morning through the fertile Flanders  
lands?

## NOW IS THE HOUR

## I AM WITH YOU ALONE, O VENUS

Now is the hour that shadows hold,  
and evening, like a tender lay,  
drifts down round houses and round souls  
and languid-lingered dies away  
in quiet twilight's muffling fold . . .

Now every soul has peace to keep.

and meals in every house are blessed;  
and he who felt the ache to weep  
feels calmness sighing in his breast  
like summer seas awash with sleep . . .

— O pain of all remembered pains . . .

For us alone there is no peace,  
O my far child, in the slow strains  
of evening song that does not cease  
across the thanking evening plains.

I am with you alone, O Venus, fierce, fell star,  
and where in my own breast I seek your fire in vain  
only my heart's old hesitance and deadness are.

My mouth is hard, no question stirs again,  
and even what's first to come and last to go from me,  
even fear itself has left my empty brain.

I am with you alone, my eyes are dry and wide,  
while in the vast, domed arches of the night  
my cold forsaken spirit seeks the loneliness of your light

— The windows blind, the rooms all bare and thin,  
a beggar's house, unvisited, and naught within,  
thus in the land of Silence is my soul;

where you, alone, in Heaven's garden a rose,  
a fiery-passionate rose in Silence's dark land,  
always alluring, fresh and glowing stand;

and I, with poverty of head and hand,  
in my poverty, of heart not even yearning,  
lack even the frugal joy of lonesome burning.

### I HAVE A WIFE

I have a wife. I have a child.  
and I have heavy cares that weigh . . .  
O gnawing pain for lovers mild,  
the thinking on tomorrow's day.

— The heavy nets go overboard.  
the traps are plunged beneath the flood;  
for all my hope of rich reward,  
I dip up slime and worthless mud.

Sometimes there comes, like beauty's pledge,  
a water-rose unfolding life . . .  
O gnawing cares at the heart's edge;  
— but I've a child, and I've a wife.

### YOU WHO SO STRONGLY GIRT

You who, so strongly girt with love,  
watch timid by my chair  
when now my daily poem becomes  
again a daily prayer,

you, my wife, the lovely orphan  
of my love and sorrow,  
who know my happiness and fear  
about this spring, this morrow,

and how, when fiercer strength ignites  
my wild and pious fires,  
torn by bright imaginings,  
I fear my own desires,

you who sit here at my side  
before this fear, this wrong,  
while I force into a prayer  
the hotness of my song:

O wife. O wife. O my good wife,  
who know my suffering mesh,  
who know the way my spirit mourns  
for what delights my flesh:

accept from one who cannot curse,  
but must accursed wander,  
accept from him who saw your grief  
his thanks, and his poor slander.

## THE ROSES

The roses breathe and dew  
in the twilight peacefully true.  
The shadow, a jewel-case,  
holds the chestnut tree in place.

In the mist the pond shines white,  
the comforting night begins.  
— Turn on, turn on the light!  
O child, my fright begins.

## I AM A HAZEL-NUT

I am a hazel-nut. A pale, soft worm  
lives in my room, and it is blind with greed.  
I'm one who feeds a darkness with my seed,  
and I become an emptiness, that does not speak or heed.

I am outside myself. I suffer from my need.  
An endless meal, in a circle closed and firm,  
I feed a thankless, dumb, impatient worm!  
But if a child's hand touches me, a curious thing:  
he hears my hollowness; I sound; I sing.

## THERE HANGS WITH MEASURED TAMP

There hangs with measured tamp across the sea  
a dull, sad bell. The mist is white as wax,  
the day has neither light nor clarity —  
and he whose heart's his own knows what he lacks.

A voice resounds, and everyone walks lost.  
I walk alone and know that here again  
are thousands like me carrying through the mist  
like pans of milk filled all too full, their pain.

Do not go back, you would not find the turning.  
One same complaint, tomorrow, yesterday . . .  
The mist-bell fills, invisible and warning,  
the white night of day.

## I ONLY ASK FOR REST

I only ask for rest: I do not ask for peace.  
—O tender evening-shine of lamps and faces,  
when noble night rolls up along day's misty places,  
when will your pure glow make my worry cease?

Cool-kissed to tranquil dream the scorching eyes;  
and quenched the sultry blood of daily tries;  
and where a few last cares so slowly toll to sleep,  
together love and grief their bitter sweetness keep.

O tender evening shine of lamps and lips aglow  
— But you, my flinty soul, that strike in vain your 'no'  
on all the cliffs, where not a spark persists . . .

I do not ask for peace: I only ask repose,  
I only ask the rest that, virgin rose,  
comes up like moonrise from the weary day, the  
mists . . .

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